Luella and said with a little whisper: "Let us go 'way. 'Rico wanna go home."

"And that is where you can take him, so get out, both of you!" It was a command.

Luella turned as if to obey him and walked towards the door. As she did so she realised the predicament they were in. They were miles away from civilisation with no transport, and no means of paying for any. If she had been alone she might have walked, but she had Enrico with her. She knew by the way he was clutching her that the little boy was frightened. With what was an enormous effort she turned back.

"Please . . Your Grace," she said in a pleading tone, "please . . listen to me while I . . explain what has happened."

"I am well aware of what has happened," the Duke said. "I am holding it here in my hand. This is a poisonous attempt by a man who ought to have been hanged years ago, to extract an enormous sum of money from me in order to prevent a scandal." He was getting more angry as he went on: "But this time he has chosen the wrong man! I will fight him in every court here or in Italy before I will part with a single penny!"

"And . . what about . . Enrico?" Luella murmured.

"He can go back to the gutter where he came from and you can do the same!" the Duke replied. "Doubtless you will find some misguided idiot to protect you, but you can tell Signor Vecchio that it will not be me!" Again the way he spoke was so offensive and at the same time spoken so quietly and bitterly that every word hurt.

There was silence.

Then Luella said: "I can . . understand that, if, as you say, this whole . . business is a hoax . . and Signor Vecchio is attempting to . . blackmail you . . but I . . Your Grace . . have no wish to play any part in your . . affairs."

She stopped speaking to hold her head high before she continued: "I would like you to know that my name is Luella Hanley . . and my father was a distinguished writer. I became . . involved with Signor Vecchio by chance when I was . . on my way to the . . British Embassy in Milan."

She took a deep breath. "When he asked me to . . oblige him by bringing Enrico to you because his . . mother was dead . . I very foolishly . . I admit . . agreed to do so . . simply because I had no . . money as I had just paid for my father's funeral . . with all we had left in Italy." Her voice died away.

Then taking Enrico by the hand she walked towards the door. "I hope, Your Grace," she said, "we can find a farm-house or a cottage where they will give us shelter for the night . . otherwise . . we shall be obliged . . to sleep under a hedge!" She lifted her chin as she spoke and reaching the door put her hand out towards the handle.

It was then the Duke said: "Wait!!"

Luella did as she was told, but she did not turn round.

"Are you telling me the truth?" he asked.

"I always tell the truth," Luella replied.

"And you really are Richard Hanley's daughter?"